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AND OTHER POEMS BY JAMES LAYER

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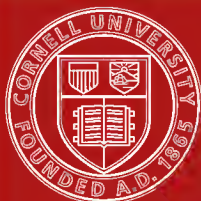
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His Last Sebastian
and Other Poems

His Last Sebastian

and Other Poems

By James Laver

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL
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To

Lawrence D. Holt, Esq.

In memory of a debt which I can never hope to repay,
and which I trust I shall never be so ungrateful as to forget

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HIS LAST SEBASTIAN

(*EL GRECO LOQUITUR*)

COME grasp your brushes, fall to work again
On yet another picture of the saint
So often drawn ; and still I find me fain
To put once more my impulse into paint.
How my hand trembles—too late up at nights,
Hanging round ladies' casements, that's your crime.
You won't remember serenades and fights
Are hot youth's work ; you take no heed of Time,
Though Time takes heed of you, this bald pate shows,
This straggling, grizzled whisker on my chin.
'Tis Age and endless labour are my foes,
And too much love of loveliness my sin.
Come, fall to work : how long ago it seems
Since first within the high Palencian dome,
An unknown foreigner, with only dreams
To feed both soul and body, far from home,
I traced my vision, caring only then
For slender form, and silken olive skin
With rose-red gleaming through the veins as when
The wine-like blood of boyhood beats within.
The naked body, helpless at the stake,
On that I daily squandered all my craft ;
Worked on at meal-times merely for the sake
Of planning duly each voluptuous shaft.
Make no mistake, my pious connoisseur,
Sebastians swarm on every palace wall,

But in your zeal you need not thence infer
We hold him most heroic of them all.
These saints and martyrs doubtless for the Cause
Died splendidly, and yet are seldom viewed
Because the fools, slain for God's holy laws,
Madly omitted to be martyred nude.
El Greco, you grow flippant ; mend your ways.
Is this the way to paint for Holy Church ?
Mind when you come at last to end your days,
Her ministers don't leave you in the lurch.
Well, well, I've painted pious things enough
To win the gratitude of monk and priest.
They value at no little price my stuff,
They'll grant me final unction at the least.
What wretched chalk ! I'll break the fellow's pate
Who sold it me ; I really wonder how
Such wares are made as I have bought of late,
But still I save the cash for models now.
If I can't draw a naked boy by this
I'll cut my throat with my own palette-knife ;
So printed on my brain each feature is,
That it's as good as drawing from the life.
And yet a change has come, I know not why ;
I cannot picture him as once I did ;
I do not gaze upon him with an eye
Bright gleaming underneath the drowsy lid,
With an exhilaration quite the same.
Some unnamed mood has seized upon my hand
And guides it where it would. 'Tis not the fame
That I have gained in this a foreign land,
'Tis not the care of popular renown
(I never cared for it, and there's an end.
My wares alike to cardinal and clown
I gave, but never troubled to defend)

But in this last Sebastian I paint
The glow of youth evades me, and I trace
Almost against my will, a livid saint,
A death-like pallor creeping o'er his face.
The vigorous and healthy form is gone ;
The mouth is wide, the eyes are raised to heaven ;
Tipsy with ecstasy he reels upon
A withered trunk, he feels his vitals riven
By the sharp shafts of more than human love.
Even as my own fingers trace the line
I see my child escape me, see him move
In a whole world of thought which is not mine.
I see reflected in his eyes the gleam
Of ghostly suns, in some unearthly land,
And all his being melted in a dream
I never quite attain to understand.
So felt I with St. Louis, King of France,
And so with Fra Hortensio, my friend,
As if my erring hands had done perchance
More than my skill as artist did intend.
What, is there something, something I have missed,
In striving to live fully ; some great loss
Sustained, in spite of all the lips I've kissed ?
Lurks in this exaltation of the cross
Something to satisfy the soul indeed ?
What, Soul, have I denied you ? Every mood
Has had its gathered sweetness, each whim's need
Been satisfied, and living has been good
To me, tho' thirst was never quite assuaged,
Such was the weakness of the swaggering brain,
That reeled while yet the tongue's hot fever raged,
So that I sought satiety in vain.
Was *theirs* assuaged then ? Is there in my soul
More than I guess, some well of deep desire,

Some blundering purpose striving towards a goal
Undreamed of yet, some hidden altar's fire
Almost extinct, yet ripe to burst in flame
Touched by the finger of God? Would it suffice
To see it, when I called upon His name,
Go soaring skyward with my sacrifice?
My sacrifice is this, it needs not more;
Even in virtue men must specialise,
To paint my vision, striving more and more
Towards perfection. Is there in God's eyes
A higher aim? What tho' the world should say
With tongue in cheek, in eyes a merry light,
"El Greco paints his martyred saints all day,
And kisses harlots' painted cheeks all night?"
This is my last Sebastian, never more
Shall I essay this too corporeal dream;
But fly the subjects that I sought before,
And settle down to paint things as they seem.
What are these bones and sepulchres to me,
The things that theologians discuss?
Sure never in their city on the sea
My masters the Venetians taught me thus.
And yet I know not, sensuous beauty swims
Before my eyes, my daily dreams are made
Of laughing lips and slender ivory limbs.
And yet—oh sometimes I am half afraid,
Deeps beyond deeps, to gaze into my heart,
And see myself as something small and mean,
All incomplete, to know my nobler part
Is, after all, the self that might have been.

Who knocks? who knocks? Oh it is only you!
Depart my girl, as quickly as you came.

You must think I have nothing else to do.

Besides, I weary of you, and your shame—
That story of the soldier and the priest—
All the town knows. . . . Well, you may rest
awhile,

You shall not call me cruel at the least . . .

I wish my martyrs could be got to smile
In just your way.

No, I will not be good,
And take you to the comedy to-night.
I'm busy, and I would not if I could ;
And if the Censor's sleepy court did right
'Twould ban such bawdiness.

Its laughter hides
A moral, so you think? Oh, many *crimes*
Do that, and yet are punished—and besides
I've seen the thing already—several times.
What's that you say?—If my mood should prove
wrong,

Alvarez says he'll take you to it, does he?
I'll see him roast in Hell first—Come along,
You know I can deny you nothing, hussy !

THE PERFECT KNIGHT

WHERE the slow Scheldt pursues its sluggish
way

Through the flat Flanders country to the sea,
Long years ago uprose a castle grey,
With wardered tops, and banner floating free.
Fair battlements enclosed the noble house,
And in its walls a princess mourned her spouse.

Yet not too mournfully, for she was young,
And it was longtime since her lord was dead.
Though when his princely orisons were sung
She wept true sorrow for him with bowed head,
Yet Spring returns, and Winter's glooms are gone ;
Even in cloisters eyes desire the sun.

So dwelt she with her brother, a young lord
Who loved all day to chase the fleet-foot deer.
An open hand, light laugh, and ready sword
Were his ; he loved fair dames and royal cheer.
“ Sorrow,” he said, “ my Sister, is a thief
Stealing good days ” ; so weaned her from her grief.

Then she put off her mourning, and appeared
Like the young sun, in crimson shot with gold ;
With a sweet bending kindness that endeared
Her to all hearts, young pages to the old
Woman who tired her hair, but most of all
To one young noble, strong and fair and tall,

Her brother's favourite, and used to bear
Much of the cares of state, and by his side
At hawking or the coursing of the hare,
Or after the fierce forest boar to ride ;
Who dared to view the lady on the height,
And started back, blind with excess of light.

Yet was she gracious to him, and would call
Him to her side, and hold sweet intercourse,
Most sweet to her, for lonely splendours pall ;
The fountains of the heart choke at the source,
Finding no way ; but in her listener's breast,
What breathless joys, what passion unconfessed !

There was a garden on the sunny side
Of the high wall, and there they used to walk
The flower-flanked paths, and the smooth grass-
 lawns pied
With silver stars and golden cups, and talk
Of the four seasons and their ebb and flow,
And man's life, whence we come and where
 we go.

And when the apple's cheek was turning red,
They trod one day the leaf-strewn paths alone.
And ever and anon he turned his head
To steal a glance at her sweet profile, shown
Clear as a cameo against the grey
Of the dark wall, and felt his senses sway

And his brain reel, and all his fingers numb,
His heart a serpent gnawing at his side.

He strove to speak, but his parched tongue was dumb.

He felt his manhood, like an ebbing tide,
Recede, then with despair's last strength endowed,
He seized her hand, so that she cried aloud.

For one wild moment of his masterhood
He stood above her, then before her eyes,
Cold as new steel, a very caitiff stood ;
Knowing that he whose rash presumption flies
Too near the midday sun, will fall as he,
The waxen-winged, but to a nameless sea.

He dropped his lids, and fell upon his knees.
" No mercy crave I of your wrath," he said,
" Princess, do with me even as you please."
So saying, he bent lowly down his head
As for the headsman's stroke, nor more did speak ;
But two hot tears made channels down his cheek.

The princess bent her head and looked at him,
And saw the quick drops from his eyelids flow,
And felt her own two lustrous eyes grow dim
With tears, to see such beauty brought so low.
Sadly she smiled, but blind with shame was he,
So that her gracious lips he could not see.

Then she reached out her hands and took him up,
Yet not too warmly, for she knew his pain,
And would not he should grasp the sacred cup
Upon this altar, with rude hands again.
And softly came her tender words, and slow,
" Remember, and be wiser, and now—Go ! "

He stayed but to implant one burning kiss
Upon her hand, light resting in his own ;
Then without looking turned away, and this
She loved in him, finding herself alone
With her own thoughts, that he had not delayed
Whining for more grace, when his debt was paid.

When in the audience chamber of his prince
She saw him next, he dared not look on her ;
As if the shame that weighed upon him since
His mad attempt was more than he could bear.
But she strewed kindness in his way, as kings
Largess ; and spoke of fair and pleasant things.

So slowly was his sorrow put away,
And he became her very faithful slave ;
Knowing he never, never could repay
Both what she kept from him, and what she gave.
In chase or danger ever by her side,
More gladly for her sake he would have died,

Than when he loved her in more fleshly wise.
And she, admiring him as one who holds
A difficult path, bent on him kinder eyes
With favours freelier granted, as unfolds
The petal of the rose in Summer's prime ;
But Eros is no bond-slave unto Time.

The soul is mixed of many elements,
And best and worst so strangely intertwined,
That no man knows his uttermost intents,
Nor where the pathways of his nature wind.
What subtle alchemist with peering eyes
His own heart's blood can wholly analyse ?

Truly he loved her as he might a star,
Or as Endymion loved the stooping moon,
Or as an Empress throned above him far,
Who yet might draw him to her ; so too soon
High was confused with low, and worst with best ;
Once more rose phoenix passion in his breast.

Truly she was a woman, and most fair,
And he a man well-favoured, tall, and young.
How could he ride with her, and see her hair
Glint in the sun and feel his bosom wrung
By her black lashes laid along her cheek,
And yet not love her, though he might not speak ?

How could he love the queen in her, nor yet
The woman also, when she laid in his
Her long white fingers ? How could he forget
The ardour and the rapture of one kiss
He planted on them ? How could he forbear
To raise his lids and, thirsty, look on her ?

One thought possessed him, that he must possess
Not the mere outer precincts of the soul,
Not half of Dian's silver disk, or less,
But the white rounded fullness of the whole.
Love makes, however wise or pure before,
Of every man a blind conspirator.

He fell to schemes ; what fall, alas, was there !
In his dark brain a thousand projects stirred.
And still he served, and rode along with her
To hunting or to tourney, ever heard
His bounding heart, his hollow breast beat through,
And held his breath, lest she should hear it too.

Long leagues away, perched on a dizzy brink,
There was a woodland castle of his own,
With fair streams where the deer came down to drink,
And the wild boar was heard upon a stone
Whetting his tusks ; and there he begged his lord
Come with his train, and share his humble board.

To which the prince consented, and rode through
The cobbled streets of little Flemish towns,
Where all the villagers came out to view
His splendour ; burgomasters in furred gowns
Made him right welcome ; so reached speedily
The wilder lands more distant from the sea.

And to the castle came amid the wood,
And blew loud horns that echoed down the glen,
Startling the lone wolf on the trail of blood,
And striking the dull ears of simple men,
Keeping their herds of swine, with joy and fear,
Such careless, military notes to hear.

It was a fair house the young lord possessed,
Strong walls without, and princely cheer within ;
Wide halls and pleasant rooms with arras dressed,
With well-flagged courtyards, where the busy din
Of hooves and clinking armour never ceased ;
A noble chapel too, and learned priest.

In one broad wing his master he bestowed,
With lodging for his lackeys and his court.
And every service a true vassal owed
To his liege lord, he doubly paid, and sought
Each day to keep the royal spirits light
With hunting, and the long carouse at night.

But for the lady he designed apart
A lofty chamber pannelled all with oak ;
Showed her the windows pictured with wise art,
And modestly of all its beauties spoke ;
The pillared bed, the hanging curtains dight
With Hector and with Ajax, and the fight

That rolled round Troy ; the heavy mantel hung
With gilded arms brought home from Palestine ;
Took down a lute, and plucking at it sung
A stave or two, with voice and accent fine
As any troubadour ; but nothing said
Of the trap-door hidden behind the bed.

Some days he lay in wait, and played the while
The worthy host, curious of far delights
To please his guests, concealing with a smile
The solitary anguish of long nights ;
And with a manner debonair and gay,
All the wild, clamorous longings of the day.

When once a heady passion finds free course,
What power can stay its swift, tumultuous flow ?
Pricked by desire, yet galled by new remorse,
He felt the pains that guilty lovers know.
To touch her hand was trembling misery,
And her white throat most agony to see.

No ardours of the chase could soothe his pain,
Nor by long masses could his wound be healed.
One god alone he worshipped, and his brain,
Tipsy with incense and boys' voices, reeled
Then most of all, to see her kneeling there,
Her lovely, flowerlike head bent low in prayer.

Then he could wait no longer, and he knew
That though all hell should gape beneath his feet,
One wavering light of love he must pursue,
One bitter draught must drink and find it sweet.
Then to the flaring altar turned his head,
And madly prayed, scarce knowing what he said.

The Lady's chamber was above his own ;
And when night fell on wall, and moat, and tower,
And no sound but the wind wailing alone,
Or weary warders calling the late hour
Broke the warm silence, to his room he went,
And sat and mused awhile on his intent.

He sent his squire and little page away,
And barred the door, and silent, listening stood ;
Heard in the wind the windows creak and sway,
And scurrying rats behind the wainscot wood.
Nay, what was that dull beating, with a start
He hears ? Only his own wild heart !

Then with a ladder of silk cords he climbed
Up to the roof, and cowered trembling there
While the loud midnight bell evilly chimed,
And harsh vibrations seemed to fill the air
With murmuring tongues. He stayed till all was still,
Then searched with groping fingers round until

He found the spring that raised the secret door.
A moment more he stood within the room,
Moving with stealthy feet over the floor,
To where the huge bed glimmered through the gloom.
Present desire consumed his late alarms,
He clasped the sleeping princess in his arms.

But she awoke and loudly called for aid,
And tore at his strong arms with frenzied hands,
But all in vain; he mad with passion made
Her lips touch his, and drew with tighter bands
Her body close, and hearts together pressed,
Felt her warm bosom beating on his breast.

She screamed aloud as one about to die,
Reached out and slipped her poniard from its sheath;
Struck at his face, so that he gave a cry
And loosed his hold, in instant fear of death;
Heard on the door her frantic fingers beat,
And down the corridor, swift running feet.

An aching sickness held him, and he reeled
Towards the trap-door, dreading death or worse;
Another instant and he lay concealed,
Hearing the old voice of the princess' nurse
Above his head; then dazed with his mischance,
Lay on his bed all night as in a trance.

The princess doubted not who it might be
Whose passion had so far destroyed his wit.
Fingering her blade she cried, "If it be he,
To-morrow morn his head shall pay for it."
"Madame," replied the nurse, "but tell me true,
Were blows and wounds all that he had from you?"

"Ay, all," the princess said, "in Mary's name,
And by the dagger's wound across his face,
The light of morning shall declare his blame,
And vainly shall he cry to me for grace."
"Your wrath," replied the nurse, "I needs must
praise,
But love drives men and women in strange ways.

“ Consider, madame, that what made him mad
Was your own beauty, was his love of you ;
That while that passion burned in him he had
No place for mere devotion ; oh, 'tis true
Strong reasons breed great sins, more reason we
Should lean to mercy, needing clemency.

“ Oh, you forgave him once long months ago,
That guessed I well, but, madame, can you swear
'Twas mere forgiveness to receive him so,
Not partly that you wished to have him there ?
Truly he fell, and honour's lamp burned dim,
Have you, my princess, never tempted him ?

“ And if he die, think you the world's sharp tongue,
Which for all gossip sometimes hits the truth,
Will hold you guiltless ? will not turn to wrong
Your very good, your beauty, and your youth ?
And as for him, so shamed and fallen, say I,
'Twill seem a very little thing to die.

“ Madame, thank God, the beauty and the strength
Even of such a one as he prevailed
Nothing against your virtue, and the length
Of careless days but finds you doubly mailed.
Many a maid a meaner lord endures,
After a life far more austere than yours.

“ Breathe no one word to any living wight
Of what has passed, lest pride should charm your will.
Lest, double danger, what befell this night
Should wake to life a fire that smoulders still
In every breast, and *you* should lose your worth :
Horror and hate bring sometimes love to birth,

“ But that he feel his folly, nor abuse
The clemency God puts into your heart,
More than a formal courtesy refuse,
And step by step withdraw yourself apart. `
Both for his sake and yours ’twere better thus ;
God in His mercy look on him and us ! ”

The princess listened to her sober speech,
Knowing its worth, and kissed her nurse’s hand
Saying, “ I will do even as you teach,
And oh, dear heart, how well you understand ! ”
Then slept without another thought till day
Wakened the lark, and rose up fresh and gay.

Her brother was desirous to depart,
And she consented, eager to be gone.
Their host with bleeding face and heavy heart,
Feigning a sudden fever, lay upon
His hated bed ; and very humbly sent
His suit and service to them. So they went.

Days passed away, they met again at court ;
But side by side walked never more, nor rode
Together hunting ; he no longer sought
More than his due, and she on him bestowed
An equal courtesy with all the rest.
He bowed his head, and knew that it was best.

Years passed away, the princess grew a dame
Known for her goodness throughout all the land.
Wise words she had for sorrow and for shame,
And for the fevered brow a cool, kind hand.
And he, he served her very faithfully
In humble channels where no man might see.

The swift years passed away, and both were old ;
Until one day the old fire in his side
Sank, and his heart was seized with sudden cold.
He called the priest to shrive him ere he died,
Received the rites with joy and holy fear,
And added one prayer that no man might hear.

They buried him with pomp, as did befit
His station and his worth, in cloisters dim,
With dirge, and passing-bell, and candles lit,
And the old princess shed one tear for him. .
She reared a tomb, with blazoned scutcheons dight,
And carved thereon, " My true and perfect knight."

ENVOI

Queen Marguerite, the tale—your tale—is told ;
Oh dear dead lips that Clement Marot knew,
That curled at nothing but a heart too cold
To sin or to forgive ; I come to you
Knowing, with this true offering in my hand, .
That somewhere you will hear, and understand.

WINDERMERE

THERE'S an isle in the midst of the lake,
Which the daring plant their feet on,
And I touch it again, for the sake
Of a girl I once was sweet on.

We'd a scorn for all make-believes :
"In earnest," how can you ask it ?
With our hearts on our jacket sleeves,
And our lunch in a wicker basket.

You were wearing a striped sports coat,
For sports coats then were the fashion ;
And your blouse showed an open throat,
Asking a kiss of passion.

Did I kiss you ? Perhaps I did.
I was ever a love-lorn dreamer ;
And our cove was splendidly hid
From the gaze of the passing steamer.

We were safe from laugh or shout
As if we were far to ocean.
And what did we talk about ?
I haven't the slightest notion.

Even now, as I step on the shingle,
The flame gives a final flicker,
Sets my finger-tips in a tingle,
And my heart to beating quicker.

Did we love?—love's a mighty word,
So many varieties in it—
A life-long harmony stirred,
Or a buzz in the ear for a minute.

But just for a moment we rose
Above all that was mean and petty—
And rowed, at the long day's close,
Back to the village jetty.

And sought out father and mother,
And went home to tea and a kipper
In the darkness, like any other
Bank-holiday Lancashire tripper.

BOULEVARD DES ITALIENS

ON a café seat, with a glass of liquor
To make eyes bright and brain work quicker,
You may think yourself indeed to be at a
Spectacle moving as any theatre.
When for a minute the way is clear,
Squeeze back into the corner here.
We shall see something, sooner or later—
Yes, two glasses of vermouth, Waiter,
French and Italian mixed together,
To put our wits in a finer feather,
And make us view with a novel kindness
The ways of the heathen in his blindness.
Straight in front swings a great arc-light
Making a stage, whose wings are night.
Each of us sits in a front row stall;
And audience, drama, we see it all.
A steady stream goes surging by,
Riches and poverty, low and high,
Into the glare of our lamp for a minute,
Out again almost as soon as they're in it;
Never a pause, while the eye grows weary.
Something magic, fantastical, eerie,
Our sense of reality mazes and troubles—
Are they human, or just dream bubbles?
Is it a pasteboard scene we see?
Are they puppets, or are we?
There goes the bourgeois and his wife,
Tethered fast to an ordered life.

He knows who sins must count on paying,
But yet can't keep his eyes from straying
(How his self-imposed chain rankles)
To a *fille de joie* and her pretty ankles.
So he passes but others follow,
Their joy in living just as hollow,
(Their stolen glances sly and thievish)
Their pride in virtue just as peevish.
See the boy who sidles near
To a bold brunette, and in her ear,
What is it that he longs to tell her?—
Hah, here comes the carpet-seller,
Pushing his way through the lounging throng,
As he carries his heavy wares along,
Extends both arms to show the tints,
Displays his muslins, and his prints,
His furs, and scarves, and odds and ends,
All from Cairo, he pretends.
Quite a disturbance in the crowd,
Then a voice that calls aloud—
“Hah, *mes amis*, come and hear,
Let both old and young draw near.
I will sing a song to move you,
One to make the sirens love you.”
Here before our seat he stands,
A one-stringed fiddle in his hands,
A humorous face with eyelids blinking,
Well-cut features marred with drinking,
And a tired——wife with a wary eye
On the husband who would like to try
So many of the coloured liquors
Perched on a shelf where the gaslight flickers.
The voice tails off in a sorrowful sound,
The song is done, and the hat goes round.

And then he moves to another place,
His wailing voice and his merry face.

What makes all the passers stare ?
There's a little child on the pavement there,
Seemingly lost from its mother's care.
It stretches hands to the sweeper boys,
And laughs at the man with the clockwork toys,
And staggers about in its childish way—
Who on earth can have lost it, pray ?
Of a sudden the smile goes out of its face,
It feels alone in a strange wide place,
And gives a sob, and stretches its arms
For someone to comfort its swift alarms,
And chase away its horrible fears.
A moment more and it bursts in tears.
A woman steps forward from the rest,
And catches the little one to her breast.
For a moment she seemed to symbolise
All that a woman is at best ;
Till you see with a shock the pencilled eyes,
The reddened lips and the powdered face,
The short skirt worn with a catching grace,
The network stockings to make more sure
The fate of whoever may take the lure. . . .
Yet why not let her hold the child ?
Is the heart so much defiled,
That therein flame may not burn still ?
Have we not also done her ill
And held her so much merchandise,
On which desire might work its will. . . .

Diable, I swear there are tears in your eyes.
Drink up your vermouth and don't sentimentalise !

TO FRÄULEIN KÄTE BIERKOWSKI
ON SEEING HER IN THE PART
OF "VIOLA"

FRÄULEIN, I do not speak your tongue,
And here in Munich am among
An alien folk that love me not.
Yet can I not abate one jot
Of what I owe you ; in my sight
You make amends for Schrecklichkeit.
To you, who make Cesario live,
Even "Unser Shakespeare" I forgive,
And can forget he speaks through you
A language that he never knew.
In what fair form, from head to feet,
Such merriment and passion meet !
"Diana's lip," and such eyes too
The ardour of the soul looks through !
Oh blind Orsino, not to know
The hand that soothed his fever so ;
In love with love, and not to see
The form that set his fancy free ;
After such far desires to pine
When close at hand stood poured-out wine ;
Over the message to make moan,
Nor know the messenger his own.
Oh boy, with girlish grace endued,
Two spirits that my grasp elude,
Twin mystery, one form in twain,
Both ways I woo you, both in vain.

30 TO FRÄULEIN KÄTE BIERKOWSKI

To see you "in your maiden's weeds"
Should give me all my fancy needs,
Yet were it hard to lose for those
Your boyish tunic and your hose,
The sword you clanked in manly pride,
And all in terror cast aside,
Your length of limb, your lissome tread,
The jaunty cap upon your head—
All, when your escapade began,
You donned as trappings for a man.
Fräulein, you make it hard for me
The Lady or the Duke to be,
And leave me, like Orsino, lost
Whether as maid or boy you charm me most.

THE MONARCHIST

I BOUGHT to-day for less than a penny—
For a mark indeed, and the values vary—
A picture postcard lying with many
Of kings and statesmen, old and hairy.

I ask who it is, and the shopgirl winces ;
In sullen silence the box she reaches.
And I know it's one of the Wittelsbach princes
In his feathered hat and his Tirol breeches.

His cheeks with youth and health all glowing,
He sits at ease on a rocky boulder,
His white knees and bare ankles showing,
To make the most off-hand beholder

Pause and gaze at the well-cut chin,
At the shapely nose, and the parted lips.
Oh happy woman, who finds therein
Her life's whole sweetness, as she sips

Her honey thence ! oh happy creature
To let her hands caress his throat,
And his eyes, and hair, and every feature,
Until she knows them all by rote !

Good republicans may murmur,
Socialists look glum and grim ;
Their clamour only seats him firmer
On the dais I have raised for him.

He may be destined yet for a higher place.

I wonder if he's converted many . . .

I've had him hung up over my fireplace—

Did I tell you he cost me less than a penny?

Munich, 1921.

THE SHADOW

EARLY I rose and saddled horse,
And left my bedfellow to lie,
Sworn to be far upon my way
Before the sun was high.

High in the heaven swam the moon,
Loud on the stones the four hooves rang.
The pathways wind, we leave behind
The woods where late the cuckoo sang.

The grasses glow a hidden green,
Blue in the moon the boulders shine ;
The little stars dodge in and out
Among the branches of the pine.

The little stars move in and out,
And in and out I pick my way.
While far before the summits hoar
Flush with the first red beams of day.

All on fire the summit seems,
Though all the glen is dark and grim,
Like one loved face that comes in dreams,
Clear-cut among the shadows dim.

Over the long range strikes the sun,
Parts with a wand of light the lake
Of shadow filling all the vale,
The colours of the cliffs awake

THE SHADOW

And glow and glisten in the light
With sheen of mottled marble vein,
With quartz and granite winking bright,
And one far torrent falling white,
To mount in mist again.

The thirsty sun drinks all the dew.
Ah, weary are the paths that wind
O'er plains from whence have vanished too
The pools of dark, Night left behind !

Onward I ride, nor pause nor stay
Either my beast or me to rest,
Till looking up see, half surprised,
The day slant to the sudden west.

I travel on an open road,
At whose far end I see aglow
With the last beams a little inn,
Whose host and swinging sign I know.

Before its porch I loosen rein,
And swing my foot from stirrup free ;
And dark against the lamplight stands
A burly form to welcome me.

Within is warmth and cheerful light,
And all that tired men desire.
With grateful limbs I sink to rest,
Deep in the ingle of the fire.

Until I see a shrouded form—

My heart is cold with sudden fear—
And hear a too-familiar voice,

“ Well, bedfellow, so you are here ?

“ How far you rode your horse can tell,

But all in vain from me you fly ;
For all the yet untravelled road

We ride together, you and I.”

With that he rose and kissed my brow,

“ To-morrow we have far to ride.”
I took his hand, and once again
We slept together, side by side.

THE SAINT REPENTS

COME, come, life flies, and we have lost our youth!

What have we known of laughter or of love?
I burn with the desire of lovely things,
The lips I might have kissed, the smooth white arms
That might have made a willing slave of me.
God, God, the stiffened fingers of the wise
Already have their grip upon my heart,
Have laid an icy hand upon my brain
To stop its beating. Oh a purer love
May please a purer lover; I must be
As Earth has made me, and I love thee, Earth,
For all the agonies that are thine own,
For all the ties that make me one with thee,
For birth, and love, and yes, at last, for death,
For thirsty Nothing's last voluptuous draught. . . .
I might have lived more boldly had I dared,
I might have gone more freely had I known,
I might have spent what has been wasted else,
And scattered wide my little store of gold
To gem the lawn, and shame the buttercup
With brighter glint of metal. . . .

Colours fade,
Bright colours, and the music that I love,
Full of imperious batterings at the door
Of convent virtue, full of tender sweets
To those who yield and let the lover in.
The colours fade, and in the darkness wails
The ghost of music, barren, comfortless,

Lost in the branches, and the waterfalls
Tumbling down in sheets of monotonous foam
Between the trees, whispering unceasingly
The sorry tales that fill the lives of men. . . .

.

Quick, quick, the crucifix ! I must not die
Unshriven thus, losing both worlds at once. . . .
Too late. . . .

In manus tuas, Domine. . . .

A CENTENARY

THE "Times" had a column or more to-day
About an etcher who "passed away,"
In '68, and was born, you know,
Exactly a hundred years ago.
After his death he grew quite famous,
And so, lest the city of Boston shame us,
The British Museum, after a rare chase,
Has succeeded at last in effecting a purchase,
With plenty of expert advice and pother,
Of some "Rue des Toiles à Bourges" or other.
It seems it's a prize, a unique first state,
Unknown to the world, of uncertain date.
It shows a high perspective of roofs,
On the paper he used for his finest proofs ;
And the expert sees with delighted eye
That the lines of shading across the sky
Of the final etching are not yet drawn.
So we are here at the early dawn
Of the finished thing, and all the attraction
Of the incomplete comes into action.
But while on the work itself we are doting,
A point or two might be worth noting
Of the life of the man. He was born in Paris,
And if you think that item carries
At once the hint of the man's position—
His father was a Scotch physician.
That sort of thing sometimes occurs—
His mother was a French danseuse.

Nothing we know of the courtship's magic,
But the end of the story was merely tragic.
The mother died, of what is a mystery,
And the father himself is lost to history.
The orphan child in the end is seen
Exploring the world in the French marine.
But he gives it up from his love of sketching ;
He is colour-blind, so he takes to etching.
And his life ? He never could rise above
The unknown rut, he was crossed in love,
He saw his scanty hoard decrease,
His etchings sold for a franc apiece.
Till weary of striving, his brain grew mazy,
And people decided he was crazy.
They locked him up, then having no doubt
The man was harmless, they let him out.
So he was free for a while, until
He despaired to watch his dwindling skill,
And the growing film on his poet's eye,
And so he returned to the place to die.
And now the dealers say his things
Fly on a thousand gilded wings.
Not even Turners, Whistlers or
Rembrandts have been so scrambled for.
And what he scarce could give away
Show prices soaring day by day.
And I know the French if they find his tomb
Will scatter flowers, or perhaps make room
Among their sons for another one
To sleep in the nation's Pantheon.
In any case the stone will be covered
With the praise of the hero they've discovered,
And the people, excepting those from age
Too feeble or blind, will do him homage.

Too late for his delight, 'tis true,
But still the best that they can do.
And we neglect our great men more,
Despise the fruits they laboured for,
We most of all our neighbours mustn't hit,
Because they drape this tardy pall.
It may be best so after all,
But it does seem rather wasteful, doesn't it ?

WINCHESTER

THE sun was bright and the fields were fair
The day I stood in the ancient town,
And paced the cobbled and crooked streets
By the college buildings, rising square
With the pride of a centuries-old renown,
Where all the world of boyhood meets.
Through the portals crowding come
Soldier and statesman, scholar and priest ;
Sires whose sons they have lost for a while
Only more proudly to meet them ; some
Are fully four score years at least,
But haven't forgotten their youthful smile,
Or the day when they themselves were playing,
By the same old turrets, the very same
Riverside meadows which greet them yet,
(Though now limbs fail and hair is greying)
The always glorious English game.
How could they ever forget ?

The cloisters are gay with ladies' dresses,
And the gardens rich with the trees in bloom.
In the meadow the seats are set.
As through the archway the thick crowd presses
Into the sunlight, out of the gloom,
The air is filled with a happy whisper
Pierced by the sharp, shrill laugh of youth.
The fields are full of a slumberous calm.
Though some might wish for a morning crisper,

The present is more to my taste, in truth,
Where dawning summer drops its balm.
The game, I confess, is a mere excuse
To sit all day in the Summer sun,
Perched as it were on high Olympus,
And watch the sport with the eye of Zeus,
Careless by whom the prize is won,
So that before me still may run
The lovely forms of these modern Greeks,
With their well-set limbs and their sun-browned
throats,
And the new down budding along their cheeks.
Youth I shall always hold divine !
The young child weeps and the old man dotes,
And the fool repents and the wise repine ;
But here is nothing but life and laughter,
And what is past, and what comes after
Is swallowed up in the burning Now.
The heart has never a care at all,
The blood beats quickly, the boy knows how,
And a birth of pain and an age of tears,
And the great globe's roll down the shadowed years
Is less than the spin of a cricket ball.

Night is come and the innings finished,
And the grey tower's outline is lost to view,
Lost and drowned in the deeper blue
Of the moment-ago sun-lighted sky,
Till it stands out dark to the sated eye,
Not one whit of its pride diminished.
All the world's in the Warden's garden,
Where a band is playing and lamps are lit.
Some stroll talking round, while I
Under an elm in the corner sit,

And dream of the thousand lovelinesses
Gathered here in a single hollow,
Stars entwined in the elms long tresses,
And boys that push through the bramble growth,
Like Daphne's lover, young Apollo,
Pursuing in fancy the maiden loth ;
They too take fire, and gaze, and follow,
And build in the darkness a vision sweet
Of music and shadowed tree-tops blended,
And rippled laughter, and flying feet.

The dream is over, the sweet time ended,
And I pass through the cobbled streets again,
Away from the college, towards the station,
With still an hour to wait for the train.
How shall I spend it? What relation
Is best to strike with the day gone by?
My eyes are open, my heart awake—
A mood I long for a while to keep—
An impulse comes, and I climb the steep
Of the great north road—for Tess's sake.

This was the prison her friends looked down on
When the death-flag flew from the ghastly tower,
Here the black roadway the ramparts frown on,
Yonder the walks where the turrets lower.
Here the rude hands that snapped the flower,
Fair though faded, her pain had left her,
When a too-fastidious fool bereft her
Of a lover unfit for the ways of love.
The tale is a tragedy meet to move
The stones to weep in their own despoite.
Where is the heart of Man to brook
Such unpaid love and such unearned pain?

Where is virtue if she be vile ?
Where is justice if this be right ?

But Tess was only a girl in a book,
A bubble of somebody's gloomy brain,
A man who has lost the power to smile,
Whom some of his followers are pleased
To call a genius—pretty name !
Perhaps I was moved without a cause,
But she stood to me for a world diseased,
A social wrong and a dull creed's shame,
And all the crimes of our tragic laws.

Light and shadow, shadow and light,
To weave the tapestry picture of Fate
Wherein the life of the world is shown.
The weavers' hands are hidden from sight,
And their faces, twisted to love or hate,
Lost in the shadow of deeps unknown.

Men are called to by many voices
Speaking of justice when life is ended,
Pleasure or pain in the void Hereafter ;
And one despairs and one rejoices,
Hearing the sounds confused and blended—
Angel music, and demon laughter.

SLOWLY THE SUN SINKS . . .

SLOWLY the sun sinks, soft the dew of night
falls,
Gemming with opals the river-meadow's margin ;
The cuckoo in the coppice one more " good night " calls,
Then there is silence.

Silence, save for the tired river's flowing,
And a nest of song-birds chirping in slumber.
Slowly and quietly the bright day is going ;
Night's slippered footfalls

Steal through the long fields soundless as heartbeats ;
While I awake, with a trembling of eyelids
Touched, in the moment when musing with sleep
meets,
By fairy fingers.

You have I chosen, nor Morning nor Noonday,
You, Summer Night, for religion and lover.
Here in your temple one breath of your lips pray,
Goddess inviolate !

See in the west how the crescent moon slowly
Rises, released from the tangle of tree-tops.
This is the ritual, passionate, holy,
I have awaited.

46 SLOWLY THE SUN SINKS . . .

Ah, I had then what is granted but rarely,
Only an instant the world in my bosom ;
Loosen the mooring and ply the pole fairly,
Push away homeward.

IN MAGDALEN WALKS

IN the long circuit that encloses round
The lovely park that lies towards the south,
Beyond the cloisters and the Founder's Tower
I strayed alone one Autumn afternoon,
With the bright sun gilding the yellow vanes
Upon the airy summit of the pile
That almost overhangs the white high road
That blends into the High Street just beyond.
And as I strolled there walked along with me
A figure that I somehow seemed to know,
Who talked in words familiarly strange
Of Man and many things, of Art and Life,
And summed up all existence in a phrase,
Transfixed the universe with epigram,
Yet seemed to be, in spite of all his mirth,
Consumed with a dry sorrow at the heart.
I answered him with further questioning,
And swift and bitterly came his reply—

I fell through too great love, yet not enough
For common things, and all that cheers the way
Of common men ; I was no common man,
And too great thirst for beauty led me on
(Mark how the river gleams with opal hues,
And how the light slips through between the leaves)
To drain new draughts, to seek out far delights,
To sin strange sins ; and still it tempted me
To reach the very bottom of the cup,
Till there was nothing left in it but gall,

Which I drank too, and all my tongue was scorched
And my throat withered, so that my two lips
No longer opened portals to sweet sound,
Nor feelings crystallised as to a gem
Dropped from them, but harsh words and animal
cries,
The inarticulate anguish of the beast.

It is a penalty which all must pay,
Who woo and win the Spirit of Revolt,
That many things of the *ancien régime*
Which might have lent their lives a nobleness
Are lost to them for ever ; so confused
Are they with what is poor, and mean, and base.
Around me mid-Victorian ugliness
Sprawled squat, and mid-Victorian sentiment
Dispensed fine feelings cheap, and my gorge rose.
I would have none of this hypocrisy,
And of this prudish, straited life still less.
So cried I when the coming of the Spring
First woke an echo in my boyish fancy.
Oh how I longed to gather all that grew
Of beauty, and all relics from the past
In which the spark of life still burned and moved !
Life was the thing I lived for, crowded life,
And Art as Life preserved, like crusted wine.
The senses have their spiritual mysteries
No less than that strange compound called the soul.
My senses lived, I was a man for whom
The visible world existed as a fact ;
For whom a tremor of the inward sense
Was more than all the paradise of creeds,
Was more than all philosophers could tell
Of abstract joys, in ways divorced from man.

At that time too, the Gospel was proclaimed
Of a new Art, so much more living than
That dabbling in the gold-leaf halo saints,
Supposed to be all Art could do or teach.
Then too was the discovery of the East,
And hoarded treasures of a thousand years
Came pouring to the markets of the West,
And lit the sombre chambers of dull towns
With strange new flecks of colour . . .
I did not love these things as some men do,
As symbols, but the very things themselves ;
Black lacquer boxes, tusks of ivory,
Fantastic caricatures of birds and beasts,
Boodhahs of jade, rich-carven rosaries,
To which some priest of the Forgotten Lands,
With bald head and with bony fingers, told
The infinite monotony of his prayer ;
Pipes of Canton, wherein the devotee
Burnt incense of the poppy-seed before
The shrines of sensuous slumber ; jewelled hilts
Of Indian scimitars, the thin, curved blades
Of Turkish daggers, sleeping in the sheath
Till hate or love should call them to their work ;
The pictures too of old Kioto schools,
Dim mountain peaks seen between fir-tree boughs,
Bright insects moving amid stems of grass,
Green streams with gleams of many gold-finned
fish . . .

And so, and so, lost in the palaces
Imagination built me, I forgot
The world outside, and sought out every hour
Some novel wonder, deeper shade of blue,
More antique tapestry or richer silk,
Gem carved in cameo yet more curiously.

If e'er man lived for beauty, I was he.
Think not I found it only in my dreams.
England is yet a country fair enough
In twice a thousand glades and villages,
Where smoke and chimneyed towns have never come.
These gardens too are lovely, when the Spring
First wakes the crocus, and the daffodil,
Sculptured of amber and cool ivory,
Runs wild along the margin of the stream,
And unknown stars peep out among the grass.
And later when the cherry-blossom blows
And falling, as alas ! it falls too soon,
Fills all the runnels with its driven snow.
Then comes the lilac, and a heavy scent
Hangs in the trees, so that the wakened birds
Sing as in ecstasy they know not what ;
And bluebells spring in clusters, and above
The chestnut breaks into long spikes of white,
Enamelled beetles crawl across the path,
Squirrels drop nuts, and surly water-rats
Make a swift furrow in the silent stream.
And when the Summer comes to flaunt its hues,
Then still more lovely, with the English rose
Climbing along the old, grey college wall,
And distant corn-fields burnt with poppy-red,
The meadows being full of burnished gold,
The stream nigh choked with flowering water-flags.
Then comes sweet youth to gladden all the scene,
Joyous already, with his silver mirth,
His white and scarlet, and his supple form
Bending in rhythm as the punt glides by.
Oh sweet, sweet youth, it makes my heart bound
now ;
I well remembered how it bounded then,

When I was one with it, the wine of living
Just bubbling o'er the brim in purple foam.
'Twas then I learned how short a step divides
The sensuous from the sensual ; then I found
What caverns lurk beneath the altar's foot,
To swallow all who come not worshipping
With hands and hearts white as the driven snow.
Did I fall then ? Have you not fallen too ?
Are not yourself, and the too-censorious world
Saved not by virtue from such sins as mine,
But by a coarseness of the mental touch,
A duller eye, and more material lips ?
But such an edge of feeling cannot last,
It blunts by use and eats itself away,
Till in the end the fingers have no sense
Of finer form, the nostrils no delight
In oft-distilled perfume ; and so I grew
Ever more coarse, needing a stronger taste
To make life palatable, so became
Ever more deeply fallen ; and at last
Died with a bitter jest upon my lips,
And a dead, aching weight upon my heart.

I turned to gaze at him, and he was gone,
His vibrant voice still lingering in my ear ;
While Magdalen Tower, in the eye of the setting
 sun,
Faded to violet, and its outline blurred
Beyond the dark blue of the trees beneath,
Wrapped in the slowly rising evening mist,
From the dank meadows, and the water-pools
Where lay the abandoned boats, filled full with
 leaves,
The last leaves that the day's hard gale had stripped

While it was boisterous in the frosty dawn.
But now grown old and sunk in quietness,
It whispered o'er them with a voice of peace,
Following the river winding soberly
To where it mingles with the larger stream.
Meanwhile the sun was sinking, and the light
Faded from tower, and pinnacles, and vanes,
Till all the battlemented pile was dark,
So that the eye could scarcely gauge the height,
The shape being hidden, till above it rose
One lone, shy star.

THE HERO REVISITED

WE had been friends from the earliest days,
And mingled fortunes of blame and praise
All through the changing years of school.
He was my elder, calm and cool,
Successful in all he undertook,
Master alike of ball and book—
Could have had all the fame he cared to.
I, who loved to be referred to,
Spoken of, pointed out, never gained
The smallest glory while he reigned ;
And, always second, came to be
Somewhat bitter and failed to see
The holy sanction for rules that seemed
Wholly binding on one who deemed
Life a matter of playing the game.
Not that his eager heart was tame,
Or loved a yoke that another made,
But his port was always high and staid,
And he gained a peak with speed and ease,
That I climbed slowly by degrees.
He rejoiced in a duty done ;
I, desiring light and sun,
Was doomed by a languid will to stay
Deep in the shadow, the summer day ;
Trophies never came my way.

.

I met him again two days ago,
How strangely apart may dear friends grow !

How dingy the idols of youth are seen
To be, when the years have gaped between !
We both were trying to conjure up
An ancient spirit, raise the cup
Of mingled wine at friendship's feast
Or feel the old hand-clasp at least.
We told our story and laughed our laugh,
But the present bond was only half
Of the link that had bound us in years gone
by—

What *can* live if the gods may die ?
I did my best to recall the days
Of his victories, and the faded bays
Glimmered a moment about his brow.
“ Yes,” I cried, “ I remember how
You scored your goal in the final bout,
And pulled from disaster victory out.
And how we cheered, and how you played
A sticky difficult wicket, and made
A century for a losing side.
When was it, your last term at school ? ”
But a voice within me whispered, “ Fool,
He himself had forgotten that,
But for this sentimental chat.
He was always the better man ;
Better now, while his temper can
Live in the world without the praise
Lavished upon him in earlier days.
Can you no longer worship him ?
Is it your eyes are growing dim ?
And not because the inner shrine
Seems to the whole world less divine ? ”
I cannot tell, but found it true,
We could not do what we sought to do.

Worshipped and worshipper both were stale,
Knowing the poison that lurks in "fail";
Knowing how hard the virtues grow
That seemed so easy—years ago.

.

We parted with a friendly grip,
A genial smile, and a ready lip,
As two such old friends ought to do.
I found him (shall I confess it) a trifle
Too sententious, and had to rifle
Memory's stores to deck him out,
And try to smother the lurking doubt
That he did not mean what he talked about—
I expect he found me boring too.

PETER LUDERS (1462)

NOTE.—Peter Luders was one of the earliest precursors of the German Renaissance—a man as learned as he was drunken, as great a scholar as he was a libertine.

COME, more wine, when scholars tipple
Think you half a pint will do?
Twist the wooden hogshead's nipple,
Let the stuff of life run through!
When I wandered southward begging,
Fate and fortune at their worst,
Bloody shoe and dusty legging,
I could always raise a thirst.

I was eager as a stallion
After Latin, Hebrew, Greek.
As for whispered, soft Italian,
I had learned it in a week.
I was known in Hall and College,
Or inns where needy scholars dine,
Nothing slaked my thirst for knowledge,
Nothing slaked my thirst for wine.

Oaths and vows should be elastic,
I should still (a vile pretence)
Be a damned ecclesiastic,
Had I never leaped the fence.
So I leaped it and absconded,
(How the abbot must have yelled)
And I've never yet desponded
While the books, and liquor held.

Come, more wine ; you'll pledge me, brother,
You're not of these common louts,
Snuffing up the smoke and smother
Of Church incense with their snouts.
You have got a brain to think with,
Thoughts and feelings come out pat ;
You have got a throat to drink with—
Thank your merry God for that !

When at first I crossed the border
Towards the Holy See of Rome,
Did I meet with law and order—?
Are men angels here at home ?
Men would try a sword-thrust through me—
'Tis a game that two can play.
All the wenches tried to woo me,
So, *he, he!* they had their way.

Oh, but Italy's the country,
Padua's the town for me ;
Pad your jerkin with effront'ry,
Brag a little, wander free.
You may walk from Rome to Venice,
Never find the roadway hard,
Never note your want of pennies—
There's a friend at every yard.

There's a rascal there to loot with,
Drink and quarrel with a while.
There's a scholar to dispute with
Every hour and every mile.

Each man his own easy master,
Let the grunting world go by.
Liquor made the heart beat faster,
Learning kept our purpose high.

Bah, the times have grown degen'rate :
Where's the thirst I used to know,
That in my time made some men rate
Letters high and riches low ?
Did we flock to Gaza's class-room
Striving who could learn the most,
Crammed so there was hardly pass-room,
Hoping for an easy post ?

Hoping that some slim Madonna,
With a growing prince to rear,
Would o'erwhelm with wealth and honour
One who'd make the classics clear ?
No, we went because we loved it ;
Fools, these devil-doctors think.
Our enthusiasm proved it,
Plato was our meat and drink.

Where the need of wine or wafer ?
Where the want of church or priest ?
Were our hope of heaven safer ?
We'd a creed to hold at least.
We'd a high belief to cling to,
All our country yet shall hear ;
That the whole wide earth shall ring to,
When these mummers disappear !

So I picked up scraps, and flourished
On the joys the gods afford.
Do I look so poorly nourished
Now I'm sitting at your board?
Ay, lads, had I stooped to flatter,
I'd a steady head to climb;
Though I've little now, what matter?
I have prospered in my time.

Of labour too I've had my share; man's
Thirst for truth made that his fate,
Teaching dissolute young Germans,
Boys from the Palatinate.
There the old Elector saw me,
And with many a quip and quirk,
Did his level best to draw me
Back again to Heidelberg.

"Come and teach my Saxons Latin,"
Said he with a mighty oath,
"You shall dress in silk and satin,
Feed well, sleep well"; nothing loth
I followed him across the border
To the stolid German town;
Tried to put my thoughts in order,
Tried, in fact, to settle down.

I'd have done it too, by Bacchus,
But what *can* we poor devils do,
When you moral men attack us?
You're so many, we so few!

Learned doctors sat beside me,
Found a fault in all I said,
The very bookshelves were denied me,
I wished that they and I were dead.

So I gave it up, and wandered
Making, losing many a friend.
Ay, and sometimes I have pondered
Where my pilgrimage would end.
On and on through town and village,
Foot with half a sandal on't,
Seeing men grow rich by pillage,
Seeing scholars die of want.

Then you noble fellows found me,
Entertained me like a king.
And I say to all around me,
Learning is a holy thing.
Won't I teach you Greek and Latin?
When you wrote your treatise then
On the Universe, put that in—
“Scholars are ungrateful men.”

Here no fear of Hell will reach you ;
Leave all that to those who know,
So they tell us ; I will teach you
All a sinner needs below.
Let the theologians thunder,
Fight and wrangle, as it's meet
Christian men should, more's the wonder,
Like a dog-fight in the street.

Courage then, away with sorrow,
Pleasure follows every pain . . .
We'll begin the class to-morrow,
When my head is clear again.
Drink, my lads, a final beaker ;
Once more let the nectar flow.
(I'm afraid my head is weaker
Than it was a year ago.)

Yet though faculties are shrinking,
Cash and reputation spent,
And my eyelids can't stop blinking,
I could perish well content,
(How good wine my packed head jostles)
If the world would think of me
As the least of the apostles
Of the Light that is to be !

INWARD

DAYLIGHT has faded, and this place
Is empty of all sound.
Æons may pass, the while I pace
My private cloister round.
And yet I take no heed of this,
So sweet to me its silence is.

The latticed arches as I pass
Strange shadows round me fling;
Loud on the flagstones, veined with grass,
My echoing footsteps ring.
A shaven plot is all my view—
My quiet soul looks inward too.

The silent dews of twilight fall
On every prayerful flower,
The heavens grow more imperial
Behind the cloister tower.
His seamless robe, where no rents are,
God fastens with a single star.

Although no longer may I seek
What once I counted bliss,
Sometimes I feel upon my cheek
No mortal woman's kiss,
And all along my veins the glow
That only God's pale lovers know.

The night has fallen while I dream,
And on my downcast eyes
Lights from the chapel windows gleam,
And soon the moon will rise.
But yet I have no need of this,
So dear to me the darkness is.

THE SONNET

THESE are my rooms, come in and take a pew ;
Perhaps the nearest window seat's the best.

The whisky's on the sideboard—help yourself.

The cigarettes are in the metal box,

Sham silver, on the mantelpiece, between

The bronze skull and the wooden crucifix

I picked up in a church at Amiens.

If I continued writing, would you mind ?

There is a sonnet I have set myself

To finish before twelve o'clock to-night.

Religious—yes—you know the sort of thing,

Beginning—let me see—how shall I start ?

How best express the zephyr of faint faith

That breathed into my ear, to-night in Hall

Just as they brought the same cheese savoury

They often serve—“ *Lord, when our eyes are dim,*

*Lord, when our eyes are dim with fruitless
prayer* ”—

No, no, it smacks of Tennyson too much—

“ *Lord, when our eyes are dim and cannot see*

The dream, the vision ”—vision's better there.

Can't you suggest a phrase to fill the line ?

Oh, splendid—“ *and the pilgrimage is long* ”—

That's A and B, now B and A to come—

“ *And our faint feeling with continued wrong*

Is roughened ”—come, we're getting on apace—

“ *Is roughened and we are no longer free.* ”

That's four lines of the octave ; stop a bit.

A sonnet's only fourteen lines you know ;
 We mustn't launch out in a paragraph
 Of introduction, without any end,
 Or middle even, for it to introduce.
 So now the fifth line, let it come to grips
 With subject, though I've not decided yet
 What that shall be exactly ; let me think.
*" When we have failed in what we sought to be,
 Strayed from the path we should have walked along "*—
 That line's a bit prosaic, don't you think ?
 But let it stand, it rhymes and that at least
 Is something ; still the metaphors *are* mixed,
 I grant you that—we're slaves, and cannot see,
 Our feeling's roughened, we have failed and strayed,
 Are on a pilgrimage—well, never mind,
 We'll put all inconsistencies to rights
 And root out all the *clichés* when we've done.
 The first thing is to find a rhyme to " wrong."
 Oh, " song," I've got it now—" *the sensual song—
 And for the spiritual writ the sensual song.*"
 And now there must be no more wheres and ifs ;
 We have to finish with some turn of phrase
 That spells a half completeness, as it were,
 And leave us free to draw the moral tight
 In the philosophic sextet, close at hand ;
 Some kind of invocation—ah, it comes—
" Shall we not turn, strong Son of God, to thee ? "

It's curious how one writes this kind of thing,
 Coolly, and almost as a cynic might,
 Here, on a desk, with fountain pen and lamp !
 You know what Wordsworth said all poetry was—
 Emotion, feeling, yes, but passed away
 And recollected in tranquillity.

And so I claim this octave I have made
Is faith remembered still in disbelief,
And therefore doubly faith; you smile, no doubt,
But what is faith to half the human race
But simply that?—Besides, when faith is *here*,
Here in my heart, think you I turn away
To write my pettifogging little rhymes
In hope of praise or pennies? I were mad
To spill one drop of life's most precious wine
In talking of it. Change the metaphor.
When I am borne upon a sea of sound
That rolls from some huge organ, when I thrill
With all the heart-breaks of a violin
Held in a Master's fingers, do I then
Turn round and babble to my neighbour there,
Try and describe my poor emotions, when
The music tells all there is need to say,
And far more splendidly than I could do?
But here, in cabinet, when evening comes
And blurs the outlines of a sunlit view
Of the bright world, and sunset colours fade,
And the soul turns home to look into itself,
Then I perceive, like shells upon the shore,
Left by the wave that bore and lifted me
In its embraces, little turns of phrase,
Snatches of verse, that somehow to the ear
Seem to give back the thunder of the sea
As sea-shells do, but infinitely far
And wonderfully faint as in a dream.
And these I gather with a careful hand
(I think you must at least allow me that),
And, with a certain fantasy of touch,
Arrange in patterns on a barren shore,
Till the next tide shall wash them all away.

But come, let's get to business, six lines more—
 What an infernal clatter below stairs !
 Why can't that scoundrel stop his gramophone ?
 How *can* I write and hear dance-music played ?
 The question in the last line might run on
 Into the sextet "*Shall we not*"—do what ?
 "*Shall we not kneel before Thy bitter Cross ?*"
 No, that involves a worn-out rhyme to match,
 Like loss—" *Oh barren gain and bitter loss.*"
 That will not do—" *Shall we not come to Thee,*
Shall we not come for healing to Thy side,
And touch our lips to the pure living stream
Held in Thy chalice ?"—what comes after that.
 Some kind of prayer, to round the poem off,
 Some kind of finish—" *Teach us then to pray.*"
 Then there's "*Thy side*" that's waiting for its
 rhyme.
 "*Died*" is too common—" *sigh'd, Guide,*" which is
 best ?
 "*More fully, and by sorrow glorified,*
Be visited by Angels in a dream"
 And do, well what, to sum the whole thing up,
 In ten short syllables of magic worth ?
 This supreme test is where my failure comes.
 To hell with "*Sand dunes,*" "*Vamp*" and—Edison!
 Your pardon, I am getting rather wild
 Pursuing this elusive final line.
 I seem to see a picture from a book,
 A "*Pilgrim's Progress*" of my early days
 Showing the pilgrim kneeling at the Cross
 With "*Angels hovering round*" as in the hymn.
 And then, unburdened, what did Christian do ?
 He felt new strength and rose—I have it now,
 "*And feel new strength, and rise and go our way.*"

That last line's feeble, as I must admit,
As you'd admit too, but for courtesy,
But still I can't do any more to-night.
Such as it was, the inspiration's gone
Completely, yet a load is off my mind.
Expression, even incomplete, is good,
Even of a glow that one has ceased to feel.
I must re-write the whole thing carefully
Some other evening——Have you got a match?

SOUR-MILK GYLL

WE traced the course once of a boisterous gyll,
Partly for beauty's, part for fancy's sake.
From where it lost its motion in the lake,
We climbed, beside its torrent, up the hill.
The overhanging trees were strangely still ;
While by their side the foam fell, flake by flake,
And round their roots we saw the eddies break.
So upward yet by root and stone, until
We saw the mountains raise their heads of snow.
Beneath the village lay in quiet dream,
Nearer, a shattered wall, and roofless barn ;
We seemed into the infinite to grow,
Finding the heart of the wild mountain stream,
Deep in the bosom of the silent tarn.

UP ON THE MOUNTAINS

WE will go where the desolate valley ends
In the towering crag that is poised above,
And find again our remembered friends,
And all the things we have learnt to love.

We will climb again where the torrent tumbles,
A streak of white on the mountain wall,
Where the boulder clangs and the sheer cliff
crumbles,
Where the falcons shriek, and the curlews call.

We have left the stagnant air of the plain,
And have climbed up into the hills again,
And we swear in our hearts it is double gain,
As we bow our heads to the wind, and rain.

THE UNSHARED VICTORY

THE altars I would worship at, are cold.
The gods refuse my sacrifice, and me.
Again I turn into the street, to be
An idle listener, to a tale that's told
Here in the market, where men strive for gold,
Not honour, nor the joy of ecstasy;
So free from serving, therefore only free
To spend a worthless life, till I am old.

Those others went before, and in their strength
The good gods took them ; at one draught their
life
Was quaffed and finished. Not for them the
hours
Of brooding, till the slow death comes at length.
They sang to bare their bosoms to the knife,
What matter, if the head be crowned with
flowers ?

TWO CATHEDRALS

SONNET

Tournai

DID doubt distress them, they who built this
fane
Of towering stone, in perpendicular line
Reared tapering, till the eye can scarce define
Where the light filters thro' the painted pane,
And rise with easy sweep, and fall again,
The intermingled groins? It is not mine,
This faith to hold, behold undimmed the shine
Of beauty, through the haze of tears and pain.

Here the dim memories of Rome are fused
With earliest Gothic, such as men forget
In later glories, breeding high disdain.
Yet it is sweet as Spring, the pure form used
To worship in, when men remembered yet,
The days of Childeric and Charlemagne.

SONNET

Arras

BY day, the town was sordid ; shattered wall
And crumbling house, betrayed their flimsy
make.

But night comes down with beauty, and can take
The edge from ugliness, and throw a pall
Of wonder over ruin. I recall

The night I stood, and saw the moonlight break
On pillars, broken down for passion's sake,
And desolation reigning over all.

The altar all defaced, stone heaped on stone,

There was indeed a glory that was gone ;

Yet was it lovely, underneath the moon ;

For this unearthly hush, this death-like swoon,

Lent it a solemn splendour of its own,

A strange half-echo of the Parthenon.

THE FUGITIVES

SPEAK low, the moon is out,
Yet, half concealed, is dark ;
I shudder, standing here.
What moves within the shadow yonder ? hark,
The very leaves are whispering words of fear.

Let us away, the boat is moored below,
Pursuit I fear, and death.
I hardly draw my breath.
Come let us go.

BRING BACK THE LOVES . . .

BRING back the loves of former days,
Before the heart's lyre-strings were slack,
Or cloyed with sweets of shame, and praise ;
Oh bring them back !

For we have lived a thousand nights
Of empty glare, and blandishment ;
And tasted all the world's delights,
Except content.

But days of joy and simple tears,
That leave no waste and dreary track
Along the journey of the years—
Oh that we could, for one hour, bring them back !

TITANIA

TELL me not then that you love me,
Or you will force me to declare,
Howe'er bewitching you may be,
I love you not, though you are fair.

I fear that it would break the spell,
Did I embrace you, where you stand;
And you, my fay, become so well
This altogether magic land.

This is the unsubstantial place,
That our romantic fancies make,
And all the sweetness of your face,
A charm, that kissing you would break.

LA MER EST TRISTE

I

A Sea-painter

(After Heredia)

HIS lip was by the salt sea-breezes kissed ;
He has painted for us the ocean, mournfully
grand,
Where lies the clouds' reflected amethyst,
The foaming greens, and shining yellow sand.

He has fixed on a narrow canvas the splendid sea,
And seized the shifting shadow, the flying light,
And all the colours that too quickly flee,
When line of sky and sea is melted into night.

The Sound of Kerrerra

FROM the Oban beach, as the sun was sinking,
Far to the west of the distant mountains,
Where the shadows crept, and the light was shrinking,
Swallowed in darkness;

There we stood and gazed at the twilight falling,
Blending sound and sky in a common brightness,
Heard but the waves and the wild birds calling,
Wheeling to sea-ward.

Black to the shore stood the neighbouring islands,
Mull's massy peaks, on the darkening horizon,
Blue lay asleep in the long line of highlands,
Sweeping to westward.

Dunollie's castle, the famous in story,
Has seen to their sinking, how many sunsets?
How many eyes that have looked on their glory,
Vanish for ever?

This is our life, for there is no replying
To our questions unanswered, our worth still
unproven.
For a moment we gaze on the sun that is dying,
Then comes the darkness.

III

Putting to Sea

RUN out beyond the harbour light,
And breast the open sea again.
Perhaps the comradeship of night
Will help to soothe my pain !

Oh what a song the waters make,
As round the prow they fall, and break ;
And I sing with them, for the sake
Of that which keeps my heart awake.

Ah would you, could you understand
What friends they both may be to me—
The broad grey sea that laps the land,
The long black land along the sea !

.

The harbour light is left behind,
The sea is round me once again ;
Perhaps the rude voice of the wind
Will help to soothe my pain.

PARTIR, C'EST MOURIR UN PEU

TO part is half to die ;
To die to what is dear,
To lose a little here
And there, as moments fly.

The vow pitched far too high,
The song's end all too near—
To part is half to die.

We part without a sigh,
Till falls the final tear.
Some of the soul, I fear,
We lose, at each good-bye—
To part is half to die.

REMONSTRANCE

IN love, yet not a word to write,
Nor any blithesome song to sing !
I should, were I in such a plight,
Make music out of everything.

Loving may last but little while,
And smiles and kisses soon are sped.
If courtship cannot make you smile,
Think you to laugh when you are wed ?

Go, change your tune's despair to praise,
Or you will lose her, past a doubt ;
For, sooner than endure your ways,
I'll woo, myself, and cut you out.

TO A FRIEND IN THE MOUNTAINS

Romford, March, 1918.

IN Essex, blue with distant trees,
And green with the first touch of Spring,
I stay, but on the southern breeze,
North fly my thoughts on homing wing.

My heart I sound at twilight close,
Deep in the solemn evening hush ;
And when far off reveille blows,
And mingles with the morning thrush.

While yet the camp in silence sleeps,
The past I never can forget
Returns, and o'er my spirit creeps
Remembrance, that is half regret.

For I am where the blackbird calls,
Deep in the blossoms of the plain ;
While in your ear the torrent falls,
And mountains veil their heads with rain.

'Though here the skylark pours his song,
I feel the grip of clinging dreams,
Desires, that hurry me along
To wild vales, where the falcon screams.

Where there is heather on the hills,
And nothing but the fierce bird's cry,
And flitting over thousand rills,
The phantoms of the mist go by.

A year ago, the snow was deep,
 When we together left the dale,
 And clambered upward to the steep,
 'Spite of the blinding sleet and hail.

How we rejoiced to breathe the air,
 Only the mountain-tops afford,
 While round us, on the summits bare,
 The wind, and rain, and tempest roared.

Though here red kine in pasture graze,
 And from the hedge the small birds call,
 I see the fell-sheep, in amaze,
 Huddled beneath the cold stone wall.

And feel once more the tingle glow
 Of mountain air, that thrills the blood ;
 And voice my creed of long ago—
 “ Only the path that climbs is good.”

May joy go with you in your walk,
 In wastes where every crag is dear.
 Yet think not for my idle talk,
 That I am discontented here.

For here, where Essex bursts in Spring,
 Only a clod could dare to fret.
 But I would say a holy thing :—
 “ O hills I do not yet forget—

“ Forget what ye have given, and what
 Your memory has the power to give—
 A joy in life that changes not,
 An understanding how to live.”

THE RETURN

THE fire upon the hearth is low,
The sharp wind whistles high,
And she I love, must surely know
That one she loves is nigh.
I creep and whisper in her ear,
But there is no reply.

She knows that at this time of year,
Bodiless spirits fly
Towards the burning hearth most dear,
And round it creep, and cry.
Why does she pierce my spirit so,
With such unseeing eye?

"In vain," the creeping night-wind said,
"If love be dead, if love be dead."

THE LOST LADY

(A SONNET SEQUENCE)

I

MY mistress, I would offer at your feet,
The power of loving that remains to me,
For now I know your open heart to be
More sweetly quiet, and more gently sweet,
Than cloistered convent, for a calm retreat,
Which the soul turns to, very wearily.
Yet can I not give up, at man's decree,
One jot or tittle of the freedom, meet
For minds that ever journey in the waste,
For eyes that love to scan the distant land,
For feet that will not falter, though they die,
For lips that tremble with too-eager haste
To drink truth's wine ; my lady, understand,
You must love one like this, or else—Good-bye !

II

You give no sign, because I still refuse
To wear the fetter of a narrow creed
Upon me, that you also feel the need
Of freedom, from the yoke that others choose ;
Sometimes you make me fear that I shall lose
Even you, in striving for yourself indeed.
In grasping you, I have but made you bleed.

Alas! that what I love, I must abuse
By loving, and by longing to make mine
The dear one who would have me kneel with her,
Before the altar of the crucified !
Yet what I worship is no less divine.
Believe me, love, it is not from despair,
This hesitation, nor from foolish pride.

III

Perhaps I ask too much, and so do you.
Can we not both forgive, and still be friends.
For here it seems, our life's brief passion ends,
'Though it was precious while it lasted too.
We have not done the thing we thought to do ;
The most we can do now is—make amends ;
Lifting our heads when wise Experience sends
Her sprig of rosemary, amid the rue.
'Though we have found a gulf we cannot span,
Between us by our holiest feelings set,
And the dim future things we cannot tell,
Yet pause awhile, as when our love began,
And with a voice, made pure from all regret,
Echo across the chasm that all is well !

IV

Ah well, the link is snapped. Kiss hands and part
Broken the bond that bred such joy, and pain,
And we are free to go our ways again.
The tendril that still clings about the heart,

The years will wither, and this double smart
Be soothed with Time's cold kisses. Not in vain
Have we both suffered ; weigh the loss and gain,
And know what thou hast been, and what thou art.
And I, I see you with an eye made clear
At parting, with your blessing in my ears,
Sweet as a chorus, that the angels sing.
And know that something of divine is here,
And all is best, even amid my tears—
I am not worthy of so sweet a thing.

WAS IT WORTH IT, THEN ?

WAS it worth it, then, to reject
Love, too soon suspect ?
Was it worth it, to scale the peak,
Where never a voice could speak
And say—" I love you," so
As yours did, long ago ?

Is it worth the triumph of will,
To deny that I love you still ?
Or pretend to find, in the waste,
A more ennobling taste
Of the stuff of which life is made ?
No, but I am afraid !

Afraid of the blackness of night,
Afraid of the huddled sight
Of all who have died by the way—
He who was yesterday
A man, and is now but a ghost ;
Afraid of myself the most.

Afraid of the demon within,
Of virtue as well as of sin ;
Of my god, also, afraid,
Who dwells in the body, made
Half of dust and of fire,
With a thrice-entangled desire.

So I must ever go,
Far from the cheerful glow
Of the cottage fire below,
On through the deepening snow ;
Lost, and I cannot forget,
Love might have saved me yet !

RECUEILLEMENT.

(After Baudelaire)

BE wise, my Sorrow, and be quiet too ;
You called the Night, and lo, the Night is
here ;
And in the city, covered all from view,
She brings to some, sweet peace, to others, fear ;
While the vile multitude, a grovelling crew,
Crouch 'neath the whip of pleasure, bought too
dear,
And gather up remorse, their only due—
Give me your hand, my Sorrow ; go not near !

Far from them, let us watch the vanished years,
In antique garb, on heaven's high battlement,
And sweet Regret, smiling amid her tears.
Under an arch the dead Sun falls asleep,
And in her long shroud, towards the Orient,
Listen, my love, and hear the soft night creep !

THE SONG

LOOK up, the starlights glisten,
And flit by, phantom wings ;
Bend your head, and listen
To the lonely voice, that sings
Of the cold fire of lost desire,
And aching, nameless things.

Why is music sweeter
Than anything beside ?
Because its life is fleeter,
And must our love deride.
Its very breath is seed of death,
Born, and already died.

And the day too is dying,
Yet beautiful in death ;
Oh cease an idle sighing,
'Tis waste of sweeter breath.
Bend low your ear, and you shall hear,
What the night wind whispereth.

But the sun will go on setting,
And cease the song's regret,
And the cold world be forgetting,
What we cannot forget,
For the aureole that crowned the soul,
And clings around us yet.

O SWEETEST HOUR . . .

O SWEETEST hour, the one before the night,
Help me to sound one quiet, happy stave,
That I may know, it is not broken quite—
This lute God gave.

The sun has set, the kine are in the stall,
And pale, the crescent moon waits for the dark,
While still from out the copse the cuckoos call,
And trills the lark.

Now turns the farmer homeward from his field,
The shadows deepen round the ancient yew,
And the blue hills, though not yet quite concealed,
Show up a mistier blue.

All music save the twittering birds is stilled,
The colours of the roadside blossoms fade,
And the deep furrow, in the field, is filled
With even deeper shade.

.

Now brightens up the moon her crescent high,
'Spite of the western colours that still are,
And suddenly, from out the darkening sky,
Beams the first star.

THE BARROW OF DAFFODILS

HE shambled down the sordid street,
The man with the barrow full of gold ;
While, round about him, busy feet
And all the haste of business rolled,
Quite heedlessly ;
And so went he.

Yet do but raise your eyes, and look
Upon this gleam, amid the grey.
I think the gods despaired, and took
Your gift of colour-love away.
Ye cannot see,
Nor yet can he,
Nor guess the joy he gave to me.

THE END OF THE DAY

COME bring us where the wind is low,
And the night is deep ;
And there's silence, save for the river's flow,
That we may sleep.

We have heard the lark sing, and the thrush,
We have seen the sun,
And we long for a land where sleeps a hush,
And the glare is gone.

Cover the sky with night's black cowl,
Where a soft star shines,
And no bird stirs but the solemn owl,
Among the pines.

And tread you softly in the land,
And silence keep,
And lay you down, that hand in hand,
We both may sleep.

MERLIN'S POOL

BY Merlin's Pool the lilies grow,
Unfolding into poisoned bloom ;
The trees black shadows cast below,
The lowering crags a deeper gloom.
It is not meet that you should go
To Merlin's Pool.

By Merlin's Pool the brambles seem
Malevolent and living things ;
The waters show a fairy gleam,
And in the air beat phantom wings.
Go not, my love, go not to dream
By Merlin's Pool.

O'er Merlin's Pool the wind is still,
And never bird-pipe sounds, nor song,
But in the hollow of the hill
The stagnant air sleeps all day long.
And good, they say, may change to ill,
By Merlin's Pool.

And love, they say, may change to hate,
And living hearts may turn to stone ;
And there may lurk an evil fate
To those who ponder there alone
A moment's space. Love, do not wait
By Merlin's Pool.

But travel with averted eye
And hasty feet the woodland track,
And if one speak make no reply,
And if he call you, look not back.
Follow your heart afar, and fly
From Merlin's Pool.

For where in ancient times there stood
A holy hermit's simple cell,
There is a chapel in the wood,
Where we with candle, book, and bell,
May plight our troth, and turn to good
The spell
Of Merlin's Pool.

THE WIND AT NIGHT

IT made the echoes roar and ring,
The wind that cried aloud.
And all the stars were journeying
Through little creeks of cloud,
Lit by the sailing moon,
Lit by the sailing moon.

Give me a barque in the blue, blue deep,
With a star for lamp at the stem,
Steer your course for the Port of Sleep,
Where all that come, have eyes to weep,
And nobody wearies them.

Clear the shallows of drifting foam,
Set sail on the little barque,
And point your willing prow for home,
Deep in the heart of the dark.
We are they who are flying from noise and
light,
To be lost, to be lost in the sea of Night.

ULYSSES

THE broad sail flaps upon the beam,
With long green lights the waters gleam,
The helmsman wanders in a dream.

Here no steady currents flow,
And here no winds of purpose blow,
Only sirens singing low.

Singing of the splendours nigh,
Hidden from the earth and sky,
Where the caves of coral lie.

Far away from toil and fight,
Drowsy kisses of delight
Filling all the day and night.

All the sounds of labour stilled,
Cramping care with languor killed,
Cool caves with music filled.

Then to bind a double chain,
All the pleasures of sweet pain,
All fond wishes wished in vain.

Voice that calls and hands that cling,
Pleasant is the folded wing,
Slumber is a lovely thing.

.

Hark, the yielding timbers quail
At the first breath of the gale,
Fills again the billowing sail.

O wailing voice, O passionate sea,
The end you promise may not be.
I have a nobler destiny.

SONG

GO not to sleep on the Cliffs of Desire,
For the salt sea lies below.
And ever the long swell thunders nigher,
And ever the strong tide surges higher,
 Certain and sure, though slow.
Go not to sleep on the Cliffs of Desire,
 For the salt sea lies below.

Gaze not too long in the Pool of Despair.
 No man may surely tell
What dreadful visage awaits him there,
Horribly beautiful, evilly fair,
 With the twisted smile of Hell :
For those who gaze in the Pool of Despair
 May see themselves—too well.

IS IT ALL WASTE ?

IS it all waste,
Time spent in idle dreaming,
Amid the weary haste
Of this world's common seeming ?
Is it all waste ?

Are they all lost,
The hours we passed in sighing
At Fortune crost,
And prospect of Love's dying ?
Are they all lost ?

Will they return,
The years we lost in loving ;
Once more to burn,
Our heart's despair reproving ?
Will they return ?

It comes no more,
The youthful zest in living.
Fate keeps the score.
And Tradesman Time will not be always
giving.
It comes no more.

PAQUERETTE

OFTEN hidden in the grass,
Safe from fingers and from eyes
Of the idle folk that pass,
A modest floweret lies.

Shaded by the woodland boughs,
Covered by their silence too,
There it dwells while Spring allows,
Almost safe from view.

Till an idle butterfly,
Or a glance at hazard thrown
To the gem directs your eye,
Its stalk an ample throne.

Lovely in its simple dress,
It springs up through the pregnant sod,
And pours its sweets in quietness
To Solitude, and God.

JOY IS SWIFT . . .

JOY is swift and flies away
With the fading of the rose.
Happiness will never stay,
Melancholy never goes.

When the parting guest is sped,
Joy comes too to say good-bye ;
Grief is the fellow of our bed,
Who never leaves us till we die.

Home we come from ball or fair,
Filled with joy and love's desire ;
Find our Other Self, Despair,
Brooding o'er the sunken fire.

PEPPER'S PICTURES

COMING up from the war and their schools,
Strange folk fill a big university.
Of athletes, philosophers, fools
And sages there's never a scarcity.

An observer may step just apart
And receive a half-willing auricular
Confession of what's in the heart—
There's one man I know in particular.

His fault is to blame too much,
Be a little too free with his strictures ;
But I readily pass by such
For a fine conceit in his pictures.

If a man has the cash to spend
There's a test that he stands or falls by ;
You may find him out in the end
In the stuff he adorns his walls by.

You may tell by a glance, no more,
In his heart what mood has the higher place.
Has he Venus behind the door,
And Galahad over the fireplace ;

Or merely the glittering prints
Of the latest Russian ballet ?
These are enough for hints
That the heart and the pictures tally.

Is it colour his wall supplies—
Some post-impressionist crudity ;
Or does he feast his eyes
On youngsters in well-knit nudity ?

One may choose something of Chardin,
Or animals done by Rose Bonheur,
Or somebody's *croquis*, "Un jardin,"
And one a Byzantine madonna.

And one, who's no trifler at all
But whose creed must continue a riddle,
Has Voltaire and Rousseau on the wall,
And a crucifix stuck in the middle.

And some show an instinct confused,
And some a vein pious and votive,
Or a wish to be cheered or amused,
And some a voluptuous motive—

Though many might well stand aghast
To hear themselves thought so intentioned.
But I leave them, and come at the last
To Pepper, the man I have mentioned.

His books all in disarray lie,
As if he had tasted and sipped each ;
But there's one thing that seizes your eye—
The three pictures forming a triptych.

The old lady, with face worldly wise,
Grim with secrets we need not unravel here,
By Rembrandt ; and the gay laughing eyes
Of Franz Hal's cynical cavalier.

(Prove he is not if you're able,
Then I will plead to the libel) ;
In the middle, to finish the fable,
The Rich Young Man in the Bible.

He stands disconsolate there,
His philosophy all disconcerted,
And sad eyes, as we're somehow aware,
'Spite of head and shoulders averted ;

And the two other pictures look on
And misunderstand his aspiring,
For so many things they have done
That they've finished themselves with desiring.

I suspect that the stately old dame
Would know how to brand indiscretion,
And the soldier's no fool at the game
Of the ladies whose love's a profession.

And both of them, maybe, have taste,
And one of them might be a poet ;
But there's something would turn all to waste
Their qualities, did they but know it.

Of customs, and fashions, and law,
From their childhood they both have been
heedful.

They don't see what the young ruler saw,
That one thing still may be needful.

But he saw it and knew it was true ;
Yet his heart, of the cares of the morrow full,
Found the one thing a hard thing to do,
And so went away, very sorrowful.

And we too grow weary, and tire
Of our own virtues' scheming rascality,
And momentarily long to acquire
Some transcendental morality—

Something heroic and strong,
Of no worldly worth or utility,
To prove that wrong really is wrong,
And Virtue no idle futility.

But the young man's so terribly sad,
And the lady so human and motherly,
And we feel that we can't be so bad,
With the cavalier smiling so brotherly.

And we know that the fervour is gone,
And the fire our timidities smother,
And we frown with the lips of the one,
And we laugh with the eyes of the other.

THE DYING PILGRIM

THE shadows are long on the grass,
The end of the journey is near.
Yes, for I die by the way.
The faces of pilgrims that pass
Grow every moment less clear,
Colours all merge into grey.

Why did I take to the road?
Even myself cannot tell.
Urged nor by prophet nor priest,
Lured nor by promise nor goad
Hereafter of Heaven or of Hell—
Something I gain at the least.

Little indeed have I taught,
Little indeed have I learned,
Little enough for my pain.
Yet have I laboured and fought,
Yet have I anguished and yearned
Not altogether in vain.

Still there has driven me on
Something as nameless as strong,
I did not dare understand
Through all the ways I have gone;
Yet, though it bore me along,
Soft as the touch of a hand.

What shall I call it? a creed,
Or the dim instinct that wills
 Ever to travail and fight,
Ever to stumble and bleed,
Up the steep path to the hills,
 Up the long road to the light?

Call it your God if you will,
Call it your Christ if you dare!
 Naming is nothing to me.
Lately it beckoned me still,
But has forsaken its care,
 Whispering "Now you are free."

Then I perceived I should die,
With half of the journey untrod.
 But a voice spoke soft in my ear,
Tenderly deigning reply
As a mother, and half as a God,
 "The end of the journey is here."

"For the pilgrim who still travels on,
There where he falls is his bed.
 What he has gained is the best
Even angels have won.
Heaven is over his head,
 Wrapped round about him is rest."

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